

WRITTEN BY



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THE FUTURE (OF HEALTH- CARE) STARTS TODAY

Sustainability has become a buzzword of the last couple of decades. When I first started noticing the sustainability topic, it was mostly linked to the urge to act on a number of environmental issues impacting our planet.

Then came energy security and sustainability, which, due to our geographic location and some historical facts and ties, has resonated with our society. And then came Covid - the first truly global pandemic in a long time. Concerns related to population health and healthcare sustainability were no longer confined to underdeveloped countries and deprived societies. Even the most developed and well-equipped healthcare systems were facing significant challenges. And Slovakia was no exception.

FORTUNE FAVORS THE BOLD

When we talk about sustainability, we often refer to future generations; it always tends to have that "let's-leave-a-healthy-planet-to-our-children-and-grandchildren" connotation. While this might make sense in areas where the impact of our behavior becomes visible over longer periods of time, it does not apply to all sustainability topics equally. And it certainly does not apply to health. Health starts with each and every individual, right here, right now. The Covid pandemic made us all realize the immediate threat to our health, wellbeing, and our lives - metaphorically and literally.

ART OF SUSTAINABLE HEALTHCARE

Smart, successful and forward-looking countries don't wait for crises to set up

their foundations and shape their strategies and policies.



It is our survival instinct; we all want the best healthcare for us and our families. But, somehow, as a society, we do not follow this instinct.

They act now to be future-proof. Systematically, they create an environment where bright, curious and entrepreneurial minds can thrive. They invest in education, science, research and development, and innovations. They invent and they learn from others. A country's attitude towards future-proofing is not necessarily a function of its material wealth. Of course, money helps. Wealthy countries tend to have the best education and research institutions, break-through inventions, and, consequently, they also attract more investment. It is a virtuous circle. But there are also examples of countries that have come a long way in a short time, with average resources, and often with a history that did not set them

up for an automatic success. Such examples exist in our region - our neighbor and closest ally Czechia, and just a bit further south, Slovenia. Both are from the former Eastern bloc, just like Slovakia. With Czechia, we share much more. Most of you reading this article were, just like me, born in Czechoslovakia. Yet, somehow, we took different paths.

QUO VADIS SLOVAKIA

On an individual level, we would all agree that good health is the best and most valuable asset we can ever own, regardless of our social or economic status. It is our survival instinct; we all want the best healthcare for us and our families. But, somehow, as a society, we do not follow this instinct. That distinguishes us from both Czechia and Slovenia, which prioritized healthcare

on the societal level as well. For countries where resources are limited, a clear vision, the courage to reform, and prioritization are key. Investing in a healthy population generates economic and societal values in a relatively short time and makes a huge difference in the long run.

FUTURE IS NOW

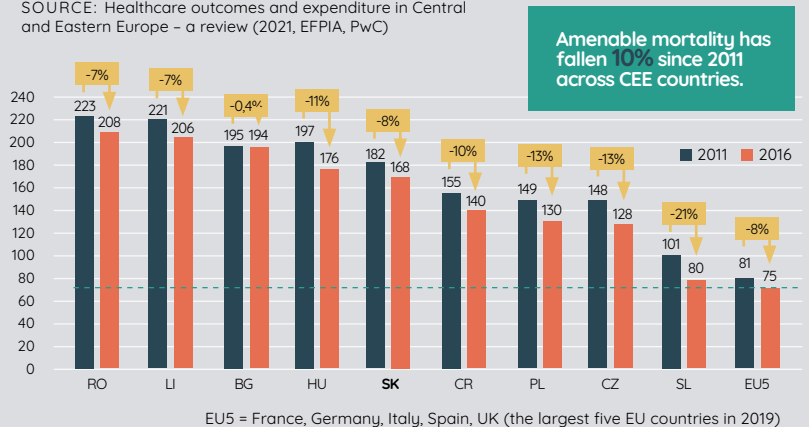
Let me borrow President Truman's wise words to wrap up: "In periods where there is no leadership, society stands still. Progress occurs when courageous, skillful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better." This timeless truth takes on a special meaning for us, citizens of Slovakia, in this pre-election time. Today's decisions shape our near and far future. I sincerely wish this

country a bright, healthy and sustainable future. I wish that we enter that virtuous circle in which health is perceived as our biggest shared asset. A future where investing in modern and sustainable healthcare is our shared survival instinct. A future where amenable mortalities fall, and where patients have the same chances to successfully face health challenges, including cancer and many others, as their fellow EU citizens. A future where people across Slovakia have timely access to medical innovations, and where healthcare is targeted, digitalized, personalized and recognized for the medical and societal values it generates. Let's all be the architects of our present, and of sustainable future for next generations, in healthcare and beyond.

■ Amenable mortality rates across CEE are twice those of the EU 5 despite having fallen since 2011

Deaths per 100,000 inhabitants, age-standardized, 2011,2016

SOURCE: Healthcare outcomes and expenditure in Central and Eastern Europe - a review (2021, EFPIA, PwC)



Amenable mortality has fallen 10% since 2011 across CEE countries.